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# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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Some time in the spring of 1908 I blocked out roughly an editorial, the purpose of which was to urge that some one undertake for Greek what has been so well done for Latin, that is, to work out a vocabulary of high school Greek, or, to put the matter differently, to prepare a select list of Greek words to be mastered by students of Greek before they present themselves for admission to college. The problem, I went on to say, presents some difficulties, perhaps, not present in the case of Latin; at least one would say, *a priori*, that many of the words found in the first three books of the *Iliad* do not recur in the student's later reading in college. But *a priori* considerations, I continued, are of no value whatever in such cases; Professor Lodge's study of Latin vocabulary has shown us that. It has shown, for example, that the number of strictly poetic words in Vergil is limited; Vergil gained his poetic effects by his manner of handling prosaic words. Here, after nineteen centuries, as the result of a study begun for wholly different purposes, we get most interesting and instructive light on something that Donatus (Suetonius) says in his *Vita Vergili* (§ 44): *M. Vipsanius a Maecenate eum suppositum appellabat novae cacozeliae repertorem, non tumidae nec exilis, sed ex communibus verbis atque ideo latentis, i. e. Agrippa* (if it was he) charged Vergil with a new kind of affectation, "not, however, the affectation of grandeur or meanness, but that of simplicity. By using ordinary words in new collocations Virgil, he said, spoke in a false tone which, owing to the means by which it was produced, was difficult of detection" (Nettleship, *Virgil*, 77). It may well be, then, I continued, that surprises are in store for him who will work out this select list of Greek words.

I am reminded of this sketch of an editorial by the reading of Professor Mac Rae's paper on A Broader Approach to Greek, printed, in part, in this issue. Professor Mac Rae makes some most interesting and instructive statements about the limitations of Xenophon's vocabulary, at least as seen in the *Anabasis*; it is clear from his declarations that for the *Anabasis* *a priori* considerations such as I voiced above about the *Iliad* are demonstrated to be correct.

It will be necessary, then, for the maker of a select list of Greek words to take into account other

writings beyond those ordinarily read in the high school course. Portions of Lysias and the *Apology* of Plato (perhaps, too, the *Crito*) should be reckoned with.

The best way to work out such a list is to make it directly from the texts themselves. Account should be taken not merely of every word, but of every occurrence of every word. In no other way can secure and final results be obtained. It would be well, after all this has been done, to test the select list by an investigation whose purpose shall be to determine how far the words of commonest occurrence in the works selected recur in the other authors usually read in college, e. g. in a play or two of Euripides (say the *Alcestis* and the *Medea*), in Herodotus VI-VII, and Thucydides VI-VII.

Meanwhile the teacher of Greek is not left wholly without aid. At various times within the last twenty years special vocabularies of Greek have been published. Perhaps the latest comes from the Chicago University Press. It is entitled *Homeric Vocabularies* and is by Messrs. William Bishop Owen and Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, both of Chicago University. In a small manual of sixty-two pages the authors give first Greek Lists, covering verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, etc., occurring ten times or more (pp. 3-29). There is a further subdivision within each main group, as follows: (1) verbs occurring 500-2,000 times, (2) verbs occurring 200-500 times, (3) verbs occurring 100-200 times, (4) verbs occurring 50-100 times, (5) verbs occurring 25-50 times, (6) verbs occurring 10-25 times. There are corresponding lists for nouns, and a third set of lists for pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, etc. There are also English lists (pp. 33-62), with precisely the same grouping, in which the English equivalents of the Greek words listed in the first part of the book are given in the exact order of the occurrence of the Greek words<sup>1</sup>. As has been pointed out by reviewers the book would be more serviceable if the Greek and the English words had been put together on the same or on opposite pages and if words derived from the same root had been set together.

This book cannot fail to be serviceable, though it attacks the problem in a somewhat different way

<sup>1</sup> The book has been reviewed by F. L. Hutson in *The School Review* 16 (October 1908), 555-556, and by W. W. Baker in *Classical Review* (October 1908).

from that taken by Professor Lodge in his study of Latin vocabulary, and in a way which, I cannot help believing, is far less useful. Other special vocabularies that may be mentioned here as likely to be of service until the permanent select list is prepared are the following:

Ferguson, E. C. *An Aid to Greek at Sight*. 46 pages (30 cents). Silver, Burdett and Co. This contains "brief lists of important words, grouped for ninety-one lessons".

Sanford, J. A. *Three Thousand Classic Greek Words*. 90 pages (72 cents). Silver, Burdett and Co. This contains "the common words, grouped in 207 lessons, for supplementary study".

The pages labeled Groups of Related Words in White and Morgan's *Dictionary to the Anabasis* (247-290) are also distinctly serviceable. C. K.

#### A BROADER APPROACH TO GREEK<sup>1</sup>

If I were asked to offer a generalization as to the greatest deficiency which the Greek students the schools send us show in their preparation, I should say that it lay in the matter of vocabulary. Students may be, and they often are, deficient in other respects, such as knowledge of forms, principal parts of verbs, case usage, prepositional usage, syntax and the like. But the greatest and at the same time most serious defect which students show in coming to us is their ignorance of vocabulary. This defect I believe to be most serious because most fundamental. For without an adequate knowledge of words a student is impotent. It is obvious that though a student have knowledge of all other things which I have mentioned and have not vocabulary, it profiteth him nothing. For while the possession of vocabulary alone will not enable a student to read, the lack of it alone will disable him. As well give a builder knowledge of materials and of all the principles of construction and ask him to build a house without brick or stone or timber, as to ask a student to read a language without vocabulary.

Both at Cornell and at Princeton I have always been much impressed, whenever I have attempted to get students to read Greek at sight, with what has seemed to me their astonishing ignorance of common Greek words. Words which I could not regard as rare, simple uncompounded words, words designating simple ideas, have been strangely absent from their vocabulary. And not only have students appeared not to know enough words, but the kind of knowledge which they have had of the words which they are able to recognize at all has seemed to me in many cases very inadequate.

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read at the Second Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, at Washington, D. C., on Saturday, April 25, 1908. I feel that some apology is due for the title of this paper. Had I not announced it before the paper was written, I should have chosen a less pretentious one. The paper has to do chiefly with the problem of vocabulary, and seeks to emphasise the need of an adequate knowledge of words as part of the student's approach to the language. —D. M.

For this deficiency I do not think that the student himself is really responsible. My inquiries have led me to believe that two things are chiefly to blame. First, the inherent limitations of the *Anabasis* vocabulary, and, secondly, the failure of teachers to make the most of that vocabulary.

That the limitations of the *Anabasis* vocabulary are very real, I have come to believe. I recently began to note down words which the students did not know, with a view to ascertaining if possible the causes of such ignorance. I found that in many cases the reason was not far to seek. In many cases—somewhat to my surprise—I found that the word did not occur at all in the first four books of the *Anabasis*. In many other cases the word occurred but once. In a number of other cases the word occurred but two or three times, so far as I could make out. Also, I found that if the word did not occur in the *Anabasis*, or did not occur frequently, it was not likely to be found in the *Beginners' Book*. For all such books make it a matter of merit that their vocabulary is limited to common words in the *Anabasis*.

At this point I should not be surprised to hear you say that if the word does not occur commonly in the *Anabasis*, it cannot be such a common word. I cannot in this paper go into a detailed consideration of this point. But I venture to say that if you were to examine the matter carefully, you would modify your opinion. You would find, I believe, that the *Anabasis*, excellent as it is in other ways, is not likely to give the student a good fundamental vocabulary. You would find that, while there are many *uncommon* words in the *Anabasis* and many words which the student is not likely to meet in his college authors, on the other hand, many words are missing or are used but rarely that are common words in other Attic writers. You would, therefore, I think, conclude that the knowledge of vocabulary which the student ordinarily brings with him from a reading of the *Anabasis* and from his *Beginners' Book*, prepares him but poorly for reading the authors which he takes up on entering college. Some confirmation of this view may be obtained by taking up a page of Lysias or of Plato, the authors commonly read at the beginning of the first year in college, and putting oneself in the place of a student who starts to read these authors armed only with his *Anabasis* vocabulary. Let us suppose that the student begins with the XVIth oration of Lysias. He will find on the first page 15 words which he never saw before. He will find seven words that occur but once in the *Anabasis*. He will find a number of other words, probably<sup>1</sup> as many as ten, that occur so rarely in the *Anabasis* that the student is almost certain not to have remembered them. Now

<sup>1</sup> The lack of a word index to the *Anabasis* makes it difficult to give accurate figures.